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Common problems in institution-building
in planning, statistics and demography

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The need for the creation of institutions which individual African countries are too poor to establish and operate on their own, but which are indispensable to the accelerated economic and social development of the African continent through collective self-reliance or which for reasons of nature, scale and optimality are best established at regional level, was the first important philosophy professed by ECA. The African Development Bank (ADB), the Association of African Central Banks (AACB) and the Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) were among the first multinational institutions to be established or sponsored by ECA at the request of African Governments. Since then, the number of such institutions has increased so that today there are very many of them operating in various strategic economic and social fields.

The experience of nearly all of these institutions over the years, has brought into focus certain common problems which should be considered and solved. As multinational institutions and in their own specialized fields of competence, these institutions have a crucial role to play in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action and in the achievement of the objectives of the Final Act of Lagos. That was why a Conference of the Chief Executives of ECA-sponsored Regional and Subregional Institutions has now been inaugurated. The Inaugural Meeting of the Conference was held from 15 to 20 December 1980.

The main problems facing the institutions flow from the lack of follow up in the implementation of political decisions, namely that after pressing for the establishment of an institution and even after approving the legal document setting up the institution concerned, many African Governments either fail to become members of the institution or, if they do, fail to give it adequate financial and material support. In many cases also the institutions are not as well known in Africa as they should be. The net result is that the growth of such an institution is stultified, disillusionment sets in and the collective self-reliance of African countries is undermined.

An alarming development has been the fact that potential donors who had promised assistance to African institutions now appear to want to give assistance to such institutions only if their membership is increased so as to give them a more truly regional character. Coupled with this is the fact that many potential Member States of institutions also wait to see how well the institutions are doing before joining them. The unhealthy vicious circle thus engendered is most harmful to the development of African institutions.

There are two main types of institutions affected by the issues discussed in this paper. Those initially created as multinational institutions at the request of the African governments and those which start life as a national institution and which subsequently become multilateral.

Of the former type of institution, the lack of membership and difficulty in obtaining contributions from members have been the main source of difficulties. And in several cases, the few Member States of such institutions like the Regional Centre for Training in Aerial Surveys at the University of Ile Ife, have alone continued to shoulder the

financial burden of operating the Centre even though more than a hundred students from over three times the number of its Member States, have received training at the Centre. In these cases, the role of the host Government in ensuring through financial and other material resources that the institutions succeed has been crucial and indispensable.

An institution which, however, does not suffer from the disability of lack of membership but which nevertheless suffers from the lack of financial resources from its many members, is the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP). All independent African States are members of IDEP and on the face of it, this should augur well for this most prestigious institution which had been established by ECA as far back as 1964, by a resolution of the ECA Conference of Ministers which thereby, ensured the membership of all African countries. But in fact, without the generous financial assistance which IDEP continues to receive from UNDP, the institute would have collapsed long ago because several of its members do not pay their contributions regularly.

The latter type of institution is represented best by the Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS) in Accra, Ghana, and the Institut de formation et de recherche demographiques (IFORD) in Yaounde, Cameroon, which although established as national institutions were multinational in the scope of their activities. The Accra Institute provides training for students from inter alia, Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, the Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda and Tanzania. The Yaounde Institute does the same thing in respect of Algeria, Benin, Burundi, Chad, Cameroon, the Comoros, Congo, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Egypt, Gabon, Guinea, Upper Volta, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Mauritius, Niger, Central African Republic, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Togo, Tunisia and Zaire.

Both institutions opened their doors in 1972 but it soon became apparent that Ghana and the United Republic of Cameroon, alone could not continue to shoulder the services provided by their respective institutions, whose benefits were made available to several other African countries. Clearly these institutions which were attempting on their own to provide training and research services in the field of population for other African countries as well, needed the support of such other African countries if they were to discharge the functions they had set for themselves effectively and efficiently. The conversion of these national institutions into multinational ones so as to enable African countries collectively to undertake what they would individually find too burdensome, illustrates the *raison d'être* for the establishment of multinational institutions. In order to spread the financial burden among several African countries, the host governments of RIPS and IFORD decided that their institutions should be converted into multinational institutions. In March 1979, the ECA Conference of Ministers in resolution 367(XIV), requested the Executive Secretary of ECA to initiate negotiations with the Governments of Ghana and the United Republic of Cameroon to convert their national population institutions into multinational institutions to which other African States might become members and contribute financially. Steps are being taken as in the case of IDEP, to implement this resolution by the establishment of these multinational population institutions as subsidiary organs of ECA and, as such, by means of

a resolution of the ECA Conference of Ministers so as to ensure the membership of all the relevant States in the multinational population institutions. But as has been illustrated in the case of IDEP the preponderance of membership alone may not be the answer.

Most of the 12 centres participating in the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) could also be classified under the second type of institution, i.e. national institutions offering regional services. However, the full regionalisation of these centres is not envisaged taking into account the relatively large number of institutions involved on the one hand, and the fact that their current financial arrangements do not pose too many problems as compared with the difficulties encountered by multinational institutions on the other hand. It is understood that user countries should pay to the centres the tuition fee part of the fellowships for their trainees. Such tuition fees normally contribute to part of the running costs of the institutions concerned.

In order to strengthen African institutions, the backstopping services already being provided by ECA are being expanded and strengthened in a systematic manner. If the institutions are to gear themselves properly to implement their part of the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos, then they must co-operate among themselves for the institutions were all designed to foster the economic and social development of the continent through common efforts and several of them have mutually complementary aims and objectives. Co-operation between ECA and the institutions and among the institutions themselves should therefore be put on a regular and effective basis.

The Inaugural Meeting of the Conference of the Chief Executives of ECA-sponsored Regional and Subregional Institutions adopted proposals with respect to the dissemination of information, aimed at making the institutions and their activities better known in the continent and thereby also inducing greater support for them. It proposed that reports of the institutions be submitted to the ECA Conference of Ministers biennially through the Executive Secretary of ECA and that the ECA secretariat should provide in addition to the support that it now gives to the institutions, legal, audit, finance, personnel and administrative services. The inaugural meeting also made the following detailed proposals for approval, by the ECA Conference of Ministers at its seventh meeting, on how to ensure political, financial and material support for the institutions:

- (a) In the case of institutions which have been established pursuant to resolutions of the ECA Conference of Ministers, individual adherence to constitutions by Member States of the geographical area to be covered by the institutions should be regarded as automatic;
- (b) There should be established by ECA a single consolidated budget consisting of the budgets of the various institutions to be presented and approved biennially by the ECA Conference of Ministers;
- (c) Contributions to the consolidated budget should be made by African Governments in respect of regional institutions and in respect of applicable subregional institutions on a consolidated basis using a formula for contributions based on the grouping of African countries into least developed, low-income and middle-income countries;

(d) ECA should consider the mechanics for the establishment of a buffer fund to advance monies for the purpose of assisting newly established institutions in getting off the ground, particularly pending the payment of contributions by member States, and to tide over established institutions temporarily during periods of financial difficulty.

The Inaugural Meeting established working groups to which the various institutions were functionally allocated. IDEP, RIPS and IFORD which attended the inaugural meeting were included within the Working Group on Social, Economic Development Planning and Management, together with the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development, the Eastern and Southern African Management Institute, and the African Regional Centre for Technology.

After considering the report of the Inaugural Meeting, the Seventh Meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers adopted resolution 409(XVI) which contains certain decisions intended to strengthen and promote African institutions. The resolution directed that a consolidated biennial report of the institutions should be submitted to the ECA Conference of Ministers in order to publicise, familiarise and bring to the attention of that important forum on a regular basis, the vital roles that the institutions are playing in the social and economic development of the region. The value of such opportunity to promote the institutions is enormous and should not be missed. Resolution 409(XVI) also dealt with the question of the automatic membership of, and of the contribution to a consolidated budget by African Governments with regard to ECA sponsored institutions and in this respect requested the Executive Secretary of ECA to examine proposals already made on this issue and to submit new proposals for consideration by the Eighth meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers. As already mentioned, the Inaugural Conference made proposals in this respect which were intended to settle once and for all, the problems affecting the lack of political and financial support from African governments for the institutions.

Similarly, the Seventh Meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers requested that the original proposals on the establishment of a Buffer Fund to advance monies to tide over ECA-sponsored Institutions during temporary periods of financial difficulties, be re-examined and new proposals submitted.

These problems were discussed by the Second Conference of Chief Executives of ECA-sponsored Regional and Subregional Institutions, held at Ivory Coast, 1-5 December 1981. Various remedial suggestions were made. It was pointed out that nothing could be achieved unless African countries were convinced by the institutions themselves through seminars, publicity and other forms of exposure, in the right quarters, of what African countries stood to gain from the activities of the institutions. It was suggested that the less expensive alternative of promoting the establishment of professional associations instead of establishing full-blown multinational institutions, might be the answer. It was also suggested UNDP country IPFS could be used to pay contributions. It was also proposed that the payment of contributions in the local currencies of Member States which could later be converted into foreign currencies by local UNDP offices would also ease the problem of non-payment of contributions by African countries which had

competing demands on their limited foreign exchange resources. It was noted, however, that the commitments of UNDP in local currencies were limited and that it was the natural expectation of host countries to expect some augmentation of foreign resources through the hosting of institutions. Attention was drawn to the fact that the West African Clearing House had, with the agreement of the governments concerned, been used on occasions by some of its members, to pay their contributions in what amounted to foreign currency through the use of local currency, to some West African institutions. The establishment of a Clearing House which embraced many more African countries would go a long way in easing the situation with respect to institutions whose Member States were far flung. It was finally agreed that membership of institutions and payment of contributions were very closely related and that even though automatic membership and the establishment of a consolidated budget were not now feasible, there should be established a Buffer Fund to help get the institutions off the ground and during bad times. It was decided that ECA-sponsored institutions should themselves make initial contributions to the Buffer Fund as this would encourage African governments and potential donors to follow suit.

Other problems which faced the institutions related to their headquarters agreements and the disparity in salaries between United Nations personnel working for the institutions and personnel engaged by the institutions.

It had been noted that in recent headquarters agreements of some of the institutions, a departure from the accepted international norms and practices could be discerned. This departure, inter alia, concerned the refusal to grant immunities to premises used by institutions outside their headquarters for temporary purposes, and the insistence of host governments to levy income tax on income derived from contributions by Member States paid to officials of institutions who are not even nationals of host countries. In order that standard immunities and privileges which are no less favourable than those provided in the United Nations Convention on Privileges and Immunities are uniformly accorded to African institutions, the Second Conference decided to submit a related draft resolution to the Eighth Meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers for its approval. With respect to the disparity in salaries paid to UNDP employees assisting the institutions and those paid to the actual employees of the institutions, it was recognised that this could bring about obvious difficulties particularly where locally-recruited general service staff were concerned. The ECA secretariat was requested to look into this matter.

It is clear that the problems that face African institutions are mainly the result of two factors, namely restricted membership which, in turn, affects the finances of the institutions, and the reluctance of some Member States to pay their contributions, or a combination of both. It is undeniable that, given the limited resources of African countries, institutions for collective co-operation such as those referred to in this paper, are essential to the economic and social development of Africa. What is therefore required is some method of ensuring that such institutions achieve their

full quota of membership and that sufficient funds are available to them to ensure their efficient and effective functioning. Various proposals have been made and whilst it would seem that the time is not yet ripe for the general application of the concepts of automaticity of membership of institutions by African states and the establishment of a consolidated budget for all institutions to which African governments are to contribute, the Conference of Chief Executives of ECA-sponsored Regional and Subregional Institutions have taken collective, practical and realistic steps aimed at ameliorating the difficulties discussed in this paper, having regard to the existing African circumstances.